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**GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING IELTS LISTENING
TO CHINESE POSTGRADUATE CANDIDATES**

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ABSTRACT

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING IELTS LISTENING TO CHINESE POSTGRADUATE CANDIDATES

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is jointly managed by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), the British Council and the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP). It is a globally recognised English language assessment whose scores are acknowledged by universities and colleges, employers, immigration authorities and professional bodies. Up until now, IELTS test centres have been set up throughout more than 110 countries and regions. Since it was introduced to China in April 1990, the IELTS has become popular throughout the country. In recent years, more Chinese are planning to study in or immigrate to English-speaking countries, and as a result the number of people who intend to take an IELTS test has grown dramatically. The growing demand has made China, with the largest population in the world, become the biggest IELTS user worldwide. However, according to the data provided by the IELTS official website in 2004, Chinese candidates' performance in IELTS (academic) is considerably worrying, whose overall mean bandscore is the third from the bottom among all candidates' throughout the world, with reading in seventh place from the bottom, with writing and speaking both at the bottom and in particular, listening in second place from the bottom. This paper proposed the guidelines for teaching IELTS Listening section 3 to Chinese postgraduate candidates of IELTS who need the minimum 6.0 IELTS band score to carry out postgraduate study in English-speaking countries. A literature review of Chinese learners, English language testing and testing listening were firstly provided, followed by the study of IELTS listening part and IELTS training materials. At the end, guidelines including a sample lesson for IELTS Listening section 3 were proposed. These guidelines are aimed at Chinese EFL teachers who are interested in teaching IELTS Listening. However, they may also be helpful for self-directed Chinese postgraduate IELTS candidates.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the role of IELTS in the world and particularly in China which is becoming the biggest IELTS user in the world. It points out that Chinese potential overseas postgraduates are in need of IELTS Listening in both academic and social aspects.

1.1 The role of IELTS in the world and in China

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is jointly managed by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), the British Council and the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP). It is a globally recognised English language assessment whose scores are acknowledged by universities and colleges, employers, immigration authorities and professional bodies. Up until now IELTS test centres have been set up throughout more than 110 countries and regions. Since it was introduced to China in April 1990, the IELTS has become popular throughout the country.

Since China began implementing its ‘open door’ policy in 1978, and especially after China entered the World Trade Organization in 2001, the need for English skills has rapidly grown. English has been playing a salient role in Chinese universities. In recent years, more Chinese are planning to study at, or emigrate to, English-speaking countries. The past two decades have seen a steady increase of Chinese overseas postgraduate students. According to statistics provided by the media (Xinhuaawang Accessed 10/04/2006) 2004 saw the figure of 114.7 thousand which tops the ranking of the overseas students in the world. The number is continually increasing.

Taking a language test and getting a positive result is the very first step when applying for international institutions, and undoubtedly the biggest obstacle for potential overseas postgraduate candidates. Consequently, the number of people who intend to take an IELTS test has grown dramatically. This growing demand has made China, with the largest population in the world, become the biggest IELTS user worldwide. However, according to data provided by the IELTS official website in 2004, Chinese

candidates' performance in IELTS (academic) is worrying, with their overall mean band score being the third from the bottom among all candidates' throughout the world, with reading at the seventh from the bottom, writing and speaking both at the bottom and in particular, listening at the second from the bottom. (UCLES *et al.* Accessed 10/04/2006)

1.2 Potential overseas postgraduate students needs: IELTS Listening

Chinese postgraduate students need to provide the overall minimum 6.0 IELTS band score in order to carry out postgraduate studies in English-speaking countries especially in the UK and Australia. Many of the most important universities require a minimum 6.0 band score for every single IELTS module, namely, listening, reading, writing and speaking. Taking the IELTS Listening test not only means achieving the entrance requirement but also means students will have a less stressful social and academic life in target countries. Participants need listening skills for survival in situations relating to accommodation, transport, entertainment, health, shopping etc. They also need listening skills to deal with academic situations, for instance, for training or study courses, lectures, tutorials, seminars, and discussions with other students on academic matters. It is hoped that study for IELTS Listening helps students to improve their general skills by being encouraged to listen in different ways for different purposes and to become more aware of the strategies that English speakers use to communicate in speech.

This paper provides the guidelines for teaching IELTS Listening to Chinese postgraduate candidates. An introduction to Chinese learners' backgrounds in addition to the literature review on listening comprehension, English language testing and testing listening will be provided, followed by an exploration of the IELTS Listening part and IELTS training materials. At the end, guidelines, including a sample lesson for teaching the IELTS Listening section 3 are proposed which are aimed at Chinese EFL teachers who are interested in teaching IELTS Listening. However, these guidelines may also be helpful for self-directed Chinese postgraduate IELTS candidates.

CHAPTER TWO: CHINESE LEARNERS' BACKGROUNDS

This chapter starts with the Chinese EFL context along with Chinese learners' difficulties in learning English. Moreover, it analyses the backwash of China's national CET examinations on Chinese university students who are potential postgraduate candidates for IELTS. It is believed that understanding this background will help to account for, and deal with, their problems in IELTS Listening.

2.1 Analysis of Chinese English learners

Teaching English in China in the 1980s and the 1990s was not aimed at improving oral communication but at reading to understand meaning. Therefore, Chinese students learnt English by reading. It was not until the 1990s that universities did try to provide opportunities for students to practise their communicative skills. (Wang 2002: 68)

It is not surprising to see that a high number of Chinese students at tertiary level cannot communicate properly even if they may have spent almost ten years learning English. In fact, they have difficulties in every aspect in terms of the four basic language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking, especially in listening to authentic materials and talking with native speakers. There are a variety of factors that give rise to their language obstacles including the influence of their first language, the academic major, cultural differences, lack of natural English environment, translation process, and personal traits such as motivation and age, and most importantly, language teaching methods. The major explanation for this is the pedagogy of English teachers at secondary level, where the way in which students are taught English focuses on translation and grammar, not speech. (ibid: 74)

In literature, the portrayal of English Language teachers in China tends to be unflattering: many articles depict teacher-dominated, grammar-focused lessons. (Maley 1990; Yang 2000; Zhang 2001). According to them, English Language teachers are the transmitters of grammatical knowledge, bound by textbooks, who fail to capture the dynamic nature of pedagogy. They stand at the front of the class translating knowledge by reading out texts sentence by sentence, explaining grammar and language points in detail while students keep notes, do multiple choice grammar

exercises, and translate passages. (Zheng and Adamson 2003: 323) In this kind of English class, few meaningful interactions and activities between teachers and students can be seen. (Zhang 2000)

2.2 Analysis of Chinese postgraduate IELTS candidates

IELTS candidates described in this paper are those who already have a undergraduate or postgraduate degree, whose first language is Mandarin Chinese, and who are at the level of lower-advanced to advanced after nine or eleven or thirteen or more years' English learning. (The few who learned English for nine years did not start to learn English until they were in the first grade of junior high school, given regional discrepancies.) They are assumed, from previous study, to have gained a knowledge of grammar and have a vocabulary of 4,000 to 5,000 words on average.

Due to the limited scope of this paper, the analysis of candidates focuses on those who are going overseas to study for master degrees. As the Chinese EFL teaching context at secondary level has already been discussed in 2.1, this section will deal with the situation at tertiary level with teaching and learning listening as the highlight. According to the National Curriculum in each institution, generally speaking, listening, speaking, reading and writing are regarded as the four basic skills needed to be enhanced within a two-year College English programme. In particular, the general objectives in listening are that students are able to comprehend conversations, reports in TV and Radio in addition to academic lectures in their specialized fields in English by the end of their two-year studies. Generally, two lessons comprising two 40-minute consecutive lessons are required for teaching listening per week. Listening materials are included in four sets of textbooks, with one being prescribed for each semester respectively, comprising scripted dialogues and monologues performed by fluent native speakers; a teacher's book and a student's book where written exercises and oral practices in class are provided. Written task types include multiple choice, blank-filling, note-taking, true or false and comprehension questions. One scenario stemming from the dialogue(s) in certain units is provided for oral practice at the end of each lesson. In a listening class, students are asked to listen to the recordings controlled by the teacher up to two to three times while they complete written exercises according to

the facts heard in the recordings. When the listening and written work is completed, the teacher checks the answers and clarifies the language points that have caused students difficulty. Very often, oral practice is omitted mainly because of there is a compulsory 'speaking course' which is conducted by teachers from the main English-speaking countries.

In short, the features of listening teaching in this context can be summed up as followed: first, the materials are from prescribed textbooks which are specially designed for language learners and therefore display features like unnatural rhythm, unnatural intonation, over-clear enunciation, little overlap between speakers, slow delivery, structured language, complete sentences as utterances, little background noise, artificial stops and starts, and densely packed information; second, interaction among students in class is rare due to the way the teacher uses the textbook, simply letting students listen to the tape and checking the exercises. In this sense, success in listening is measured by correct responses to questions or tasks; teaching listening has been reduced to testing English in this situation. This inefficient teaching model (Anderson and Lynch 1988: 68) which simply provides exposure to spoken language and testing students comprehension constitutes, at least in my institution, a gradual frustration, demotivation and eventually, poor performance. It is thus understandable to admit that these are the original factors causing students' listening deficiencies, ultimately blocking their performance in English both in communication and examination.

Another driving factor for teaching in China is testing isolated skills through the Chinese National English test format. We shall take the College English Test, or as it is widely known, the CET (a national English level test) used extensively for the past decade in the People's Republic of China as an example in order to examine the impact of IELTS on postgraduate candidates. The CET consists of non-English-specialized Bands Four and Six and English-specialized Bands Four and Eight. In this paper, the term 'Band Four or CET4' refers to the non-English-specialized Band Four exam (see appendix I) which is held twice a year nationally, every third Saturday, in June and December/January respectively. Being a 'life or death' matter for students, (Wang 2002: 101), failure to pass CET 4 means failing to receive a Bachelor degree. Its attendance figure of five million has increased dramatically annually over the past

seventeen years and the items of testing have become a priority in teaching and learning. CET 4 includes tests on listening, reading and writing skills. The format of the listening part varies slightly each time, however, generally speaking, it comprises two sections, which are multiple choice questions (MCQs) based on hearing ten conversations and three passages, or MCQs based on listening to ten conversations plus a compound dictation based on listening to one passage. (see appendix I). MCQs constitute the dominant task type.

As we shall see, CET listening is considerably diverse in terms of the components, systems and skills compared with that in IELTS. (The analysis of the above features in IELTS Listening will be provided in chapter four.) The major discrepancy may have already led Chinese IELTS candidates ending up feeling bewildered and panicked when they first encounter IELTS Listening. They are thus highly unlikely to perform well.

CHAPTER THREE: LISTENING COMPREHENSION

This chapter provides a review of the related literature on listening comprehension, teaching of listening comprehension, learning of listening comprehension, English language testing and testing listening so as to lay the grounds for discussing how IELTS approaches listening and testing listening.

3.1 The nature of listening comprehension

Anderson and Lynch (1988: 4) point out that under many circumstances, listening is a reciprocal skill which means that we cannot usually predict what we will have to listen to, but that there is at least the opportunity for speaker and listener to exchange roles. According to them, reciprocal listening refers to those listening tasks where there is the opportunity for the listener to interact with the speaker, and to negotiate the content of the interaction; non-reciprocal listening refers to tasks such as listening to the radio or formal lectures where the transfer of information is in one direction only: from the speaker to the listener.

Buck (2001: 247) states that listening involves both linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge. Linguistic knowledge includes knowledge of phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics, discourse structure, pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Non-linguistic knowledge includes knowledge of the topic, the context and general knowledge about the world and how it works. Underwood (1989: 1) believes that listening is an essential skill for successful communication, and a skill which seems to develop easily for native speakers but requires considerable effort where listening in a foreign language is concerned. In other words, listening is probably the least explicit of the four macro language skills, making it the most difficult skill to learn. (Vandergrift 2004: 3)

Anderson and Lynch (1988: 4) point out that listening effectively involves the following skills from the linguistic point of view:

- 1. The spoken signals have to be identified from the midst of surrounding sounds.*
- 2. The continuous stream of speech has to be segmented into units, which have to be recognized as known words.*

3. The syntax of the utterance has to be grasped and the speaker's intended meaning has to be understood.

4. We also have to apply our linguistic knowledge to formulating a correct and appropriate response to what has been said.

(ibid.)

With regard to non-linguistic aspects, they believe that effective listeners also command the appropriate purpose for listening; the appropriate social and cultural knowledge and skills and the appropriate background knowledge. (Anderson and Lynch 1988: 4-5)

Rost (2001: 7) points out that listening is not only a skill area in language performance, but a critical means of acquiring a second language and a channel in which we process language in real time, employing pacing, units of encoding and pausing that are required to spoken language. He (1991: 3) provides the following necessary components skills in listening which he believes successful listening involves integrating:

- *discriminating between sounds*
- *recognizing words*
- *identifying grammatical groupings of words*
- *identifying 'pragmatic units'— expressions and sets of utterances which function as whole units to create meaning*
- *connecting linguistic cues to paralinguistic cues (intonation and stress) and to non-linguistic cues (gestures and relevant objectives in the situation) in order to construct meaning*
- *using background knowledge (what we already know about the content and form) and context (what has already been said) to predict and then to confirm meaning*
- *recalling important words and ideas*

The above views share the idea that listening comprehension is not a passive, but an active process, in which listeners are actively processing and interpreting information (Mendelsohn 1995: 133). Buck (2001: 247) concludes that listening comprehension is an on-going process of constructing an interpretation of what the text is about and then

continually modifying that as new information becomes available. Mendelsohn (1995: 133) points out that listening needs to begin as a conscious process, and consequently, we need to bring the process of listening to a conscious level as listening is a process of interpreting, not merely one of decoding.

3.1.1 The teaching of listening comprehension

Listening used to be considered as not being able to be taught. It was claimed that students could only be offered practice which might help them apply their already developed listening skills to the language being learned, and that in this sense the teacher is just a provider of comprehensible input. (Krashen 1981, 1982; Krashen & Terrell 1983) This is unacceptable if we believe that ‘to teach’ means ‘to facilitate learning’ and if we see the role of the teacher as being the support and guidance of learners. (Underwood 1989: 21) Mendelsohn (1995: 132) believes that teachers are strategy instructors---teaching learners how to listen. Many scholars, Oxford (1990), Mendelsohn (1994), Chamot (1995) and Rubin (1995) have argued that good listeners use a variety of strategies. Mendelsohn (1995: 124) recommends that teachers instruct strategy in teaching, for example, teaching strategies for determining the setting, the interpersonal relationships, the topic, the mood, and the main idea, as well as strategies to help with hypothesis formation, making predictions, and inferencing. All these are important aspects of listening. With regard to lesson planning, he proposed a model for teaching listening in which a different or set of strategies as followed are supposed to be dealt with in each unit:

1. ***Awareness and consciousness-raise***, this involves discussing with students how something means what it does and making students aware of the signals and strategies that will help them.
2. ***Prelistening activities***, these can take various forms, but the important thing is to activate the students’ exciting knowledge of the topic in order for them to link this to what they comprehend and to use this as a basis of their prediction and inferencing.
3. ***Focusing the listening***, this requires the students deciding what they are going to be listening for –details, the central idea or one particular fact. They need to know what they want to find out by listening.

4. **Guided activities**, these activities would be specially designed to give students practice in using the different strategies they have been taught.
 5. **Practice with real data**, this stage is essential, it requires a lot of exposure to real listening in a good listening comprehension course. At this stage, students will be applying the different strategies that they have learned in the guided activities to real listening.
 6. **Doing something with what has been comprehended**, this means listening should be followed by some application of what has been comprehended, for example, to adopt a writing or speaking task. This is one way to replicate what people often have to do with what they have listened to in the real world.
- (Adapted from Mendelsohn 1995: 139-140)

It is believed that teaching students how to listen strategically is an effective use of teaching time. It is a far more efficient use of class time than merely providing exposure to spoken language.

Underwood (1989: 21-22) believes that a teacher's objectives in a listening class should include: exposing students to a range of experiences; making listening purposeful for the students; helping students understand what listening entails and how they might approach it; building up students' confidence in their own ability. In addition to that, part of the teacher's role is to ensure that the lesson proceeds in an orderly and productive way so that the students feel secure and relaxed and unthreatened by the listening tasks. In this sense, teachers can do two things: one is to try to provide suitable text in terms of difficulty level and motivational interest; the other is to orient students and direct their attention to sensitize them to important issues, such as the process of phonological change, or the importance of context in comprehension, and this will often help them to learn (Buck 1995: 122-125). Hedge (2000: 255) points out that the most important element in effective listening is confidence which comes with practice and with achieving success from an early stage. Therefore, the role of the teacher is to provide as much positive practice as possible by talking to learners in English, by exposing them to a range of listening materials in the classroom, by encouraging them to use whatever resources are available.

As for the concern of providing suitable text in class, it is a fundamental issue that students need to practise listening to the kind of speech that they will actually encounter in real life so that they will be able to understand and respond to what English speakers are saying. Genuineness is a characteristic of this kind of text itself and an absolute quality in terms of selecting the nature and the source of the input for listening activities (Rost 1990: 160). Recent years have seen an increase in the usage of 'authentic materials' in listening class. It is believed that authentic materials allow students to hear a much more real act of communication with all the interactional features not normally found in scripted materials (Underwood 1989: 100). McGrath (2002: 105) points out that authenticity is important because it gives learners a taste of the real world and an opportunity to rehearse in a sheltered environment, hence the more authentic the materials we use, the better prepared learners will be for the real world. Cunningsworth (1984: 72) believes that using materials with authentic language is beneficial to the learner's confidence and motivation, and therefore to his or her overall learning performance, to be able to cope with a limited amount of authentic language, which is one of the essential goals of teaching.

3.1.2 The learning of listening comprehension

Rost (2001: 7) believes that as for a goal-oriented activity, listening involves 'bottom-up' processing, in which listeners attend to data in the incoming speech signals, and 'top-down' processing, in which listeners utilise prior knowledge and expectation to create meaning. Richard (1987, cited in Nunan: 1989: 25) classifies that bottom-up processes work on the incoming message itself, decoding words, clauses and sentences; top-down processes use background knowledge to assist in comprehending the message. Nunan (1989) points out that there is a basic distinction between top-down and bottom-up approaches to language comprehension and production.

Bottom-up approaches focus on the various components of the language and then fit these together in comprehending or producing language. Top-down approaches utilise knowledge of the larger picture, as it were, to assist in comprehending or using smaller elements.

Nunan (1989: 37-38)

Many scholars (Lynch 1998, 2002; Mendelsohn 1998; Oxford 1993; Rost 2001; Rubin 1994) call attention to the critical role of both bottom-up and top-down processes in L2 listening comprehension. Vandergrift (2004: 4) clarifies that listeners use top-down processes when they use context and prior knowledge (topic, genre, culture, and other schema knowledge in long-term memory) to build a conceptual framework for comprehension; listeners use bottom-up processes when they construct meaning by accretion, gradually combining increasingly larger units of meaning from the phoneme-level up to discourse-level features. While these processes interact in some form of parallel distributed processing, the degree to which listeners may use one process more than another will depend on the purpose for listening. Research into these cognitive processes suggest that L2 listeners need to learn how to use both processes to their advantage, depending on their purpose for listening (ibid.).

As for learning listening comprehension, the ultimate goals for listeners are to attend to what they hear, to process it, to understand it, to interpret it, to evaluate it and to respond to it. (Underwood 1989: 4), Field (1998) suggests a number of strategic techniques which can be practised individually, they include:

- Using knowledge of the topic to predict what will be heard;*
- Working out gist by identifying key words;*
- Learning to recognize 'new' information marked by sentence stress;*
- Using markers as guides to changes of topic;*
- Handling unknown words by ignoring them or switch to a higher level of generality.*

Field (1998: 117)

It should be noted that techniques such as these that are practised in isolation must later be combined and applied to a longer text.

3.2 English language testing

Davies (1990: 1) believes language testing is central to language teaching, it provides goals for language teaching and monitors success for both teachers and learners in reaching those goals. Bachman and Palmer (1996: 8) claims that language tests can be a valuable tool for providing evidence of the results of learning and instruction, and

hence feedback on the effectiveness of the teaching programme itself, besides, they can also provide information that is relevant to making decision about individuals. Today English is the dominant language in science and technology, medicine and health care, commerce, business and industry, amongst many more fields (Morley 1995: 192). There is no doubt that information about people's language ability is often very important. For example, British and American universities need to have some knowledge of overseas students' language proficiency when considering whether to accept them. Therefore needs for dependable measures of language ability certainly do exist and testing can be a tool Hughes (2003: 4).

Tests can be categorized according to the types of information they provide. There are four types of test: proficiency tests, achievement tests, diagnostic tests and placement tests (Hughes 2003: 11). Due to the limited space and focus of this paper, we will only discuss the proficiency test. Proficiency tests are designed to measure people's ability in a language, regardless of any training they may have had in that language. The content of this type of test is not based on the content or objectives of language courses that people taking the test may have followed. It is based on a specification of what candidates have to be able to do in order to be considered proficient (ibid: 11-12). An example of this would be a test used to determine whether a student's English is good enough to follow a course of study at a British, Australian or an American university, for instance, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) developed in the UK and Australia; the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) developed in the USA. Such exams attempt to take the level and kind of English needed to follow courses in particular subject areas into account. Therefore, if we take IELTS as an example, it might have one form of the test for arts subjects, another for sciences ones. There are other proficiency tests whose function is different from the above, which is to show whether candidates have reached a certain standard with respect to a set of specified abilities. Chinese examples of these would be the non-English-specialized College English Test Bands Four and Six, or English-specialized Bands Four and Eight which are designed to measure university and college students' overall English proficiency and claimed as a means to promote the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in China (Jin and Yang 2006: 22). Despite the differences, all proficiency tests have the fact that they are not based on courses that candidates may have previously taken in common. Whichever type of test they belong to, there is no

best test for any given situation. A test that proves ideal for one purpose may be quite useless for another; in the same way that a technique that may work very well in one situation can be entirely inappropriate in another (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 7).

Indeed, when testing literature, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of test purpose, and it is held that no one solution can accommodate the wide variety of possible test scenarios. It is argued that appropriately differentiated tests in different skills areas need to be made available for evaluating different groups of examinees with different target situation needs. Take a closer look at IELTS again: all candidates must take a test in each of the four skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. All students take the same listening and speaking modules, but may choose the Academic or General training version of the reading and writing sections of the test. The two do not carry the same weight and they are not interchangeable, which measure the skills needed for effective study and training. In this sense, IELTS takes account of differences in subject specialisms and course types, whilst measuring candidates' general English language proficiency. In fact, IELTS is supposed to be taken by students who want to live, study or work in an English-speaking country, and especially by those who are going to follow academic courses at a university or similar institution, or more general training courses. Taylor (2004: 1) claims that IELTS is not a level-based test, but that it is designed to stretch across a much broader proficiency continuum. In fact, IELTS falls along a continuum between general purpose tests and those for highly specialized contexts and includes tests for academic purpose (Alderson and Banerjee 2001: 222). Taking the listening part of it as an example, (some of the sample tasks including recordings are available on the IELTS official website: <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/teach/ielts/listening/index.htm>), the IELTS listening test is designed to reflect real-world situations for students who are bound to have some interaction with different people in a number of situations. This is a test of listening comprehension in the context of general English proficiency, consequently the earlier sections deal with social survival topics like travel, accommodation, health and welfare; and later ones with topics in the area of education and training. Test tasks in IELTS share key features with the tasks that a test taker might encounter in the target language use situation, besides, it tests the interaction between language knowledge and specific content knowledge. Weir (1990: 11-12) believes that to measure language proficiency adequately in each situation, account must be taken of

where, when, how, with whom, and why the language is to be used, and on what topics, and with what effect because language can not be meaningful if it is devoid of context (linguistic, discoursal and sociocultural). He warns that if inauthentic tasks are included in tests of communicative language ability there is a real danger that the method employed could interfere with the measurement of the construct we are interested in. We could end up measuring ability to cope with the method rather than the ability to read, listen, write, speak or deal with a combination of these skills in specific contexts.

3.3 Testing listening

Because the major concern of this paper is to understand the nature of testing listening and not designing listening tests, this section will focus on the literature review on what the listening test entails, not the ways to create or develop a test on listening.

To talk about what testing listening demands, one cannot avoid looking at the uniqueness of listening as the first step. Listening is a complex process, in which the listener takes the incoming data, an acoustic signal, and interprets it based on a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge (Buck 2001: 247). The special problems in listening tests arise out of the transient nature of the spoken language. Spoken texts usually consist of a series of short utterances, strung together in a simple linear manner. Spoken texts exist in real time and need to be processed very rapidly as they are heard. Then having been spoken, the text is gone, and generally all the listener has left is a memory of what they understood. Listener cannot move backwards and forwards over what is being said (ibid: 60).

These characteristics need to be paid particular attention to because they require corresponding abilities. As I have discussed in 3.1, listening comprehension is not a passive but rather, an active process of constructing meaning, which can be briefly generalized as applying established knowledge to incoming sound. Considering this under the circumstance of testing, Buck and Tatsuoaka (1998, cited in Buck 2001: 58-59) found 15 abilities that accounted for most of test-taker performance in a study. Looking at a test with 35 short-answer comprehension questions, taken by Japanese test-takers, these abilities are:

- *the ability to identify the task by determining what type of information to search for in order to complete the task*
- *the ability to scan relatively fast spoken text, automatically and in real time*
- *the ability to process a relatively large information load*
- *the ability to process a relatively medium information load*
- *the ability to process relatively dense information*
- *the ability to use previous items to help information location*
- *the ability to identify relevant information without any explicit marker to indicate it*
- *the ability to understand and utilise relatively heavy stress*
- *the ability to process relatively fast text automatically*
- *the ability to make text-based inferences*
- *the ability to incorporate background knowledge into text processing*
- *the ability to process L2 concepts with no literal equivalent in the L1*
- *the ability to recognise and use redundant information*
- *the ability to process information scattered throughout a text*
- *the ability to construct a response relatively quickly and efficiently*

All these taxonomies of sub-skills are the important and understood skills which exist within listeners. They can help us see what processes are included in listening tests, they tell us listening is a multi-faced process, with a large number of sub-components that can be viewed from a number of different perspectives (ibid.).

In a more specific way, Hughes (2003: 161) lists the following informational abilities which he believes are included in listening tests to:

- *obtain factual information;*
- *follow instructions (including directions);*
- *understand requests for information, help, permission; expressions of need; apologies*
- *follow sequence of events (narration); justification of opinions;*
- *recognize and understand opinions; comparisons; suggestions; comments; excuses; expressions of preferences; complaints; speculation.*

He further classifies interactional abilities to:

- *understand greetings and introductions; expressions of agreement or disagreement; requests for clarification;*
- *recognize speaker's purpose; indications of uncertainty; requests for clarification; opinions; indications of (failure of) understanding; speaker's desire that listener indicate understanding; attempts to persuade others;*
- *recognize and understand corrections by speakers (of self and others); modifications of statements and comments;*
- *recognize when speaker justifies or supports statements, etc. of other speaker(s); when speaker questions assertions made by other speakers (ibid: 161-162).*

The above are the abilities that listening tests entail, it should be noticed that they give no relative importance to individual skills. In fact, what Buck, Tatsuoka and Hughes' research suggests is that language use can be defined from broad sub-skills, such as the ability to listen for gist, to small detailed sub-skills, such as the ability to recognise the stress pattern of specific words. These are something which can be identified statistically and are supposed to do with language. The taxonomies indicate that test takers are to test both the ability to extract the basic linguistic information, and the ability to interpret that in terms of some broader context.

A literature review on defining the sub-components of listening tests, including which abilities testing listening entail has been provided. The next chapter will look at how IELTS approaches listening.

CHAPTER FOUR: IELTS LISTENING

This chapter explores the nature, requirements and forms of IELTS Listening. A study of IELTS Listening section 3 in particular is given to provide an analysis of it and for proposing the guidelines on it in the chapter 6.

4.1 Exploration of the nature of IELTS listening

Since IELTS is supposed to be taken by students who want to live, study or work in an English-speaking country, and especially by those who are going to follow academic courses at universities or similar institutions, or more general training courses, IELTS Listening tests students' understanding of both general English in transactional situations, such as making arrangements for transport, accommodation and leisure activities, and academic situations, such as taking part in a seminar or listening to a lecture. In addition, candidates listen to conversations as well as monologues. The most important message that IELTS wants to convey to the candidates is that language is used for a variety of different functions, and that in each case the context, purpose and relationship between speakers will affect the language used.

4.2 Exploration of the requirements for IELTS Listening

IELTS Listening is taken by both General Training and Academic candidates and is designed to cover the full range of abilities from non-users to expert users. It covers the basic survival skills in a broad social and educational context, as well as the skills required for academic purposes (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations-English for Speakers of other Languages Accessed 10/04/06).

The first sections of the IELTS Listening test, sections 1 and 2, test the types of listening skills needed for survival in an English-speaking country in situations relating to accommodation, transport, entertainment, health, shopping etc. The main focus is on understanding key points of factual information. The latter sections, sections 3 and 4, focus on the types of academic situations likely to be encountered by students following a training or study course in an English speaking country, including lectures,

tutorials, seminars, and discussions with other students on academic matters. At this point candidates must be able to identify key points as well as details, and also to cope with the negotiation of meaning and follow a line of academic argument.

4.3 Exploration of the forms of IELTS Listening

The listening test is the first part of the IELTS examination and takes place at the beginning of the day. The whole test lasts about 30 minutes, including instructions, participants' reading and listening time, and the time allowed for transferring the answers from the question paper to an answer sheet. In total, it takes about 40 minutes and consists of four recorded sections, each covering a different type of language and context.

There are four sections in the listening test. Each section has 10 questions, making a total of 40 questions. Each question is worth one mark, making a total of 40 marks. Sections become progressively harder. Answers to the questions come in the same order as the information on the recording. The candidates only hear each recording once. Recordings include a range of accents, including British, Australian, New Zealand and American.

Here follows detailed information of the IELTS Listening for each section. IELTS Listening Section 1 is a conversation with a transactional purpose. The conversation may be between two friends. In this case speakers may use fillers, phrasal verbs and colloquial expressions, or they may leave sentences unfinished or interrupt one another. IELTS Listening Section 2 is a monologue with a transactional purpose. The speaker may be addressing the listeners directly, for example, a speech by a tour guide. In this case, the language may be quite informal. Alternatively, this section may present information in the form of a recorded message or a radio broadcast directed at an unseen audience. In this case, language may be more formal and with longer sentences and more complex syntax. IELTS Listening Section 3 is a conversation in an academic context. The conversation may display similar features of speech to those in Section 1, depending on the relationship between the speakers, but the lexis and structures are likely to reflect those more often heard in an academic context. The range of vocabulary is likely to be wider than that in Section 1 conversations, and there

is likely to be more negotiation of meaning. IELTS Listening Section 4 is a monologue in an academic context. A monologue in an academic context is likely to have been carefully prepared and the speaker may refer to notes as he/she gives the talk or lecture. This section is likely to be the closest to written language, with dense information and complex sentences with subordinate clauses. However, the speaker will also usually use signposting language to help the listener follow the argument. (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations-English for Speakers of other Languages. Accessed 19/04/2006)

A variety of task types is used throughout the four sections. Principal task types are:

Task Type 1 Forms/Notes/Table/Flow-chart/Summary Completion

Task Type 2 Multiple Choice

Task Type 3 Short-answer Questions

Task Type 4 Sentence Completion

Task Type 5 Labelling a Diagram/Plan/Map

Task Type 6 Classification

Task Type 7 Matching

(cited from <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/teach/ielts/listening/index.htm> Accessed 19/04/2006)

4.4 Analysis of IELTS Listening section 3: conversation in an academic context

IELTS listening Section 3, in which a discussion with up to four speakers on a topic related to academic issues is heard is more difficult than Sections 1 and 2. It is considered to be the most difficult section among the four listening sections. Two major features account for the difficulties, which are conversation and the academic setting.

Most foreign language learners agree that one of the most difficult comprehension tasks, even for advanced foreign language learners, is comprehending native speakers when they converse with each other (Krashen and Terrell 1983). The listeners, who play the role of eavesdroppers, have almost no control over the dialogue and they must deal with the stream of the sounds immediately as they reach them. The loss of phonetic details, some acoustic blurs on the unstressed syllables, characteristic pitch

movement or different local accents are very frequent in spontaneous conversation. In the situation of listening to a conversation between natives or hearing a radio broadcast they are exposed to a language output which must be interpreted at once, even though most of the time they have little awareness of the topic, the socio-cultural setting, the informal or casual style and the sentence structure. Under these circumstances, identifying opinion and attitude in addition to paraphrasing are two very important skills to deal with the problems of understanding. Consequently IELTS Listening Section 3 tests these major abilities.

With regard to the academic setting, it needs to firstly take a review of the background of it. Flowerdew (1994: 7) mentions that the spread of English as a world language has been accompanied by ever-growing numbers of people studying at university level through the medium of English as a second language, whether in their own country or in English-speaking countries as the overseas students. Increasingly large numbers of second language learners are engaged in academic pursuits which require them to listen to, and comprehend, large portions of second (target) language input. Potential and present international students are faced with often complex information to be understood and assimilated in order to proceed with academic life (Chaudron 1995: 74).

Richards (1983) was the first to distinguish between listening skills required for conversation and skills required for academic listening. Some of the differences between conversational listening and academic listening are differences in degree, whilst others are differences in kind. Flowerdew (1994: 11) further points out that the one difference is the type of background knowledge required. In an academic setting, listeners are likely to require knowledge of the specialist subject matter, while in conversation, the background knowledge necessary will be more general. Another difference is the ability to distinguish between what is relevant and what is not relevant to the main purpose although this feature is shared by listening skills required for understanding conversation. However, distinguishing between what is more relevant and what is less relevant is paramount in an academic setting, and perhaps less important in conversation. All these differences constitute the higher proficiency demanded in IELTS Listening Section 3.

From the above analysis it can be seen that in order to deal with IELTS Listening section 3, particular methods and effort are required. Are there any training materials that would provide effective methods? Would such effort be on the right track? The following chapters will provide the discussion on these questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORATION OF IELTS TRAINING MATERIALS

This chapter discusses IELTS training materials in terms of function and methodology. Instead of exploring multiple IELTS training materials, this chapter will analyse one particular set of training materials which are commonly used in China. It aims to provide IELTS training teachers or self-directed students with a generalization about the advantages and disadvantages of IELTS training materials; it advocates not having training materials dominate the IELTS training class but rather exploiting them as supplementary practices.

5.1 Exploration of materials aimed at training IELTS Listening

When most people think of China they tend to think of large numbers and an endless market. The largest IELTS market witnessed numerous IELTS training materials over the last decade. Some of these materials are produced by local writers, some are imported books produced abroad, mainly by writers from the UK or Australia. Unsurprisingly, these imported ones overwhelmingly dominated the IELTS market and enjoy a privileged place among users, even though they are much more expensive than local ones, as presumably Chinese users tend to believe that materials which are produced from the target countries are more reliable. We do not have enough space here to probe into this subtle psychological issue, but one concern that we might raise in regard to the materials themselves here is, do they really fit Chinese teachers and students' needs? This section will analyse one book, *Insight into IELTS* (updated edition) which is one of the most popular imported training books on the Chinese IELTS market.

Since it was first published in 1999 by Cambridge University Press, this book has been reprinted three times. According to the authors, (Jakeman and McDowell 2001: 5), this book is designed as the course book for IELTS training course and it is equally appropriate as a self-study resource for students wishing to improve their IELTS skills on their own. This book contains four parts: listening, reading, writing and speaking: and as a supplement to each unit there is a complete practice test, recording script and

answer key. The first part of this book is divided into four sections, aiming to reflect the format of the test, namely, listening, reading, writing and speaking, and these are broken down into units. Each section begins with an overview of the IELTS test and it is hoped that if students work their way through the whole book they will become familiar with all question types and tasks that they are likely to meet in the test. The units contain class and pair activities and opportunities for individual practice. The major concern of this paper, the listening section of this book, will be analysed in particular in the following discussion.

This section comprises seven units (see appendix II). Each has a main objective: orienting yourself to the text; listening for specific information; identifying details; identifying main ideas; seeing beyond the surface meaning; following ‘signpost’ words; being aware of stress, rhythm and intonation. The authors claim that the level of difficulty increases through the paper, and that there is a range of topics and tasks which test comprehension skills, for example, listening for specific information, such as dates and place names; listening for details, understanding gist and understanding people’s attitude and opinions. The users of this book will be introduced to a wide range of IELTS question types and additional exercises to help improve the student’s overall listening strategies.

5.2 Analysis of the function of the materials aimed at training IELTS Listening

We might observe that the structure of the listening part in this book is that each unit focuses on a particular skill. Students are not, therefore, exposed to all skills in each unit. This fact raises some serious concerns: which skill is actually developed and how much time is given to each of these skills? Take unit 6—‘*following signpost words*’ (see appendix II pp. 61-63) as an example to provide a quantative view with regard to this concern. In this unit, exercises are divided into three parts, in which students are asked to first, read ten unfinished sentences, identify the signpost words for each one and then complete the sentences; second, read aloud the finished text to their partners, with a sound extract provided for them to check their intonation patterns; third, read a brief introduction of the IELTS Listening Section 3 and listen to a sound extract which is from a university tutorial of four speakers taking part, then do three writing

exercises, including note completion and diagram labelling. As far as quantity is concerned, the exercises in this unit, even when taking the supplementary activity of it in the third part of this book into consideration, are obviously lacking. Altogether, students are just given too few tasks to fulfil. It is hard to imagine how much time is given to the particular skill and how much time students get to develop it. In fact, what happens in each unit of this book is that a new topic, new set of aims, and a new set of exercises are presented. In addition to the disappointing average quantity of exercises, the fact that students do not get to practice the same skill in a range of different contexts may result in none of the skills actually being developed. Rivers (1966: 196, 204) warns that listening comprehension is not a skill which can be mastered once and for all and then ignored while other skills are developed. This must be practised regularly with increasingly difficult materials over the whole language learning period. In this sense, despite the advantage that users of this book are introduced to a wide range of IELTS question types, it lacks in terms of the quantity of opportunities for practice.

5.3 Methodology for using the materials aimed at training IELTS Listening

With regard to methodology, this book assumes that the teacher may choose to work systematically through each section, as the earlier units in each section are designed for lower-level learners or students not familiar with the IELTS format, while the latter units are intended to stretch the stronger candidates beyond their immediate IELTS needs. The teacher may therefore take advantage of the graded approach and select materials to suit learners' needs as required. There is a gap between this assumption and Chinese teachers' and learners' expectations. With regard to the teacher, it is not enough for them to implement teaching using this principle, for instance, to select materials in this book which are in fact limited enough is difficult for them. Another concern is that as the listening skills that IELTS demands for every candidate are the same, the skills in this book should not be singled out for a group of students of a certain level. Let us look at the distribution of the units where different skills are focused. The first unit, Unit 1 (see appendix II pp. 47-48) is about learning the skill of recognizing the relationship between the speakers and understanding the context of the conversation; the last unit, Unit 7 (see appendix II pp. 64-66) concerns the skill of

being aware of stress, rhythm and intonation in speech. As far as this paper is concerned, it is hard to tell if Unit 7 is indeed much more sophisticated than that of Unit 1 or if they are equally weighted. And most importantly they are equally valuable to each candidate at whatever level, given that all of these are part of the essential skills for effective listening. Denying this fact may end up with a subtle indication among users that lower-level learners may not need to develop the skills focused on in later units. Students might feel confused and strange at this point. Besides, Chinese students have their own particular problems, amongst them, lacking sufficient exposure to the target language might be of major concern. They might feel quite distracted when diving directly into these IELTS materials which are graded before they have consolidated their language foundation. Furthermore, as I have discussed in chapter two, undeniably the backwash of domestic CET examinations has imposed a significant impact on Chinese students' concepts of carrying out listening comprehension. The discrepancy between what they are familiar with and what they are confronted with in IELTS may result in their bewilderment and horror. Therefore a great deal of effort and guidance from the teacher is needed for them to understand what IELTS demands. In this sense, teachers and students may find it difficult to use this book by simply working with what is provided in the book for an IELTS training class.

Based on the above exploration and analysis, the assessment of this book comes to a basic conclusion: it is appropriate as all aspects of the listening test, as well as the additional skills are covered in this book: it is not, however, sufficient. Firstly, the assumption of this book is that either the users of this book are already familiar with the particular area of listening and therefore they do not need extensive practice, or that they are receiving substantial training in listening comprehension in the classroom. The book does provide some practice but not enough. Secondly, the book provides generalized practice, which disregards fact that Chinese learners have particular problems. There are some things which they are not familiar with. Therefore there should be a lot more practice materials designed for them, but as this book is designed for everybody, it provides a little bit of everything. Thirdly, what both Chinese teachers and students expect is different from what is provided in the book, it is difficult for them to use it.

To sum up, when you look at the IELTS training materials which are available, for example, this book, it is arguable that the exercises are appropriate but there are not enough of them for learners, and it does not entirely fit Chinese teachers' and students' expectations. Therefore, these kinds of training materials should not play a dominant role in training but could be adopted as supplementary practice materials. It is important then for both teachers and learners to have guidelines to help them to cope with IELTS training. The next Chapter will discuss the guidelines.

CHAPTER SIX: GUIDELINES FOR IELTS LISTENING SECTION 3: CONVERSATION IN AN ACADEMIC CONTEXT

This chapter examines the guidelines which are meant for teachers, but can also be used by self-directed students. The guidelines are presented with an introduction which explains the nature of the listening tasks and listening strategies, followed by a sample lesson which aims to illustrate how such guidelines are carried out in practice. A list of useful sources of radio materials available on the Internet that can be exploited for carrying out tasks are provided in appendix III. It should be pointed out that the guidelines presented here are suggestions and recommendations but not absolute instructions.

6.1 What is involved in listening?

The nature of listening comprehension has already been discussed in Chapter Three. This section will briefly look at what listening abilities IELTS listeners are expected to demonstrate in the test.

Rost (1991: 4) believes that a person's listening ability results from the integration of perception skills, analysis skills, and synthesis skills. In addition, the listener must activate four kinds of strategies, namely, linguistic, social, goal, and content, which means that listeners need to comprehend the text as they listen to it, retain information in their memory, integrate it with what follows, and constantly adjust their understanding of what they hear in the light of prior knowledge and incoming information (Thompson 1995: 35). These abilities are demanded in IELTS Listening as well. Inevitably, the tension of being examined gives rise to some negative impact, however, it should not be overestimated as long as the participants have had consistent training prior to the test. Therefore, the goal of training IELTS Listening should aim at developing participants' listening ability and making them use their listening strategies effectively under test conditions (Bahns 1995: 536).

6.2 What is involved in IELTS Listening section 3?

As discussed in Chapter Four, IELTS Listening Section 3, in which a discussion with up to four speakers on a topic related to education will be heard, is more difficult than section 1 and section 2 and therefore demands higher language proficiency.

Participants have to follow the discussion and listen out for important facts, reasons or ideas. Participants may also have to identify views or opinions (Jakeman and McDowell 2006: 20). The ‘discussion’ here takes the form of a conversation, which generally refers to a time when two or more people have the right to talk or listen without having to follow a fixed schedule, such as an agenda. During the course, anyone can have something to say and anyone can speak at any time (Nolasco and Arthur 1987: 5). In IELTS Listening Section 3, the conversation is educational in purpose, focusing on the types of academic situations likely to be encountered by students following a training or study course in an English speaking country, including lectures, tutorials, seminars and discussions with other students on academic matters. IELTS participants need to listen to what speakers ask or tell each other, and then decide what their main points are, as well as identifying details and also coping with negotiating meaning and following an academic line of argument. Sometimes they have to understand how the idea has been re-worded in the questions (Jakeman and McDowell 2006: 21).

6.3 Skills involved in IELTS Listening Section 3

In IELTS Listening, each section of the test usually contains two or three question types, which may be any of those from the following: multiple choice, matching, classification, short-answer questions and lists, note/table/flow-chart/forms/summary completion, sentence completion, labelling a diagram, map or plan. Participants may be exposed to a mix of listening question types in any section of the test. Identifying attitudes and opinions and paraphrasing are two very important skills in Section 3. Teacher should intentionally guide the students to practice these skills by virtue of fulfilling tasks. In the following sub-chapter 6.5, a sample lesson is provided in which a variety of activities aiming at training skills for understanding content, recognizing key words and structures and the ways of expressions are involved.

In addition to question types, IELTS tests a range of listening skills that participants need for living, working or studying in an English-speaking environment, which means that participants need to be able to understand different types of spoken English in a range of formal and informal contexts. This feature is reflected in IELTS Listening Section 3 which deals with academic conversation.

6.4 Strategies for handling the tasks

In this section, we will look at a set of recommendations about ways to handle tasks. However, as we all know, strategies need to be flexible for different situations and cases. The strategies here are the advice and suggestions but not the absolute instructions to teachers and self-directed students.

White (1998: 9) believes that strategies are attempts to compensate for uncertainties in understanding, and could include making inferences, realizing where misunderstandings have occurred, and asking for clarification. Lynch (1996: 89) points out that successful listeners are those who take active steps to sort out listening problems. When they encounter a major problem in understanding, they adopt an appropriate strategy to resolve it. Listening to a conversation, intended largely for the participants, is a 'one-way event where the listener has no chance to ask for help from the speakers' (ibid: 92). The listener in the conversation is a participant. However, in the classroom, the learner is put in the position of an eavesdropper, who is not being spoken to and has no right to speak, (McGregor 1986, adapted from Rost 1990: 5), but is supposed to answer questions on the content of what was said, or the role of a judge, assessing the emotions of the speakers (Lynch 1996: 93). Whatever the precise role is, an effective listener is actively involved, even if that involvement takes the form of internal, hidden actions, and teacher's goal is producing active listeners (Brown 1990: 172).

The principles of the IELTS Listening lesson are to encourage students to actively involve themselves so that they understand content, deal with key words, recognize structures and look at the way in which language is expressed. More specifically, teachers can train and support their students in an IELTS class by:

- *selecting listening tasks on topics related to the students' knowledge and interests*
- *providing activities to remind students of what they already know about the topic and the related language before they listen*
- *making sure that students are quite clear about what they have to do for each task type, and the type of listening required*
- *pausing the tape or replaying when necessary in practice activities*
- *allowing plenty of time for checking and discussion of answers, and giving students access to tapescripts at this stage*
- *providing additional opportunities for listening in a range of non-exam formats – e.g. songs, videos, news broadcasts, real-life speakers– with tasks aimed at developing confidence and motivation*

(adapted from

http://www.cambridgeesol.org/teach/ielts/listening/aboutthepaper/develop_general_listen_skills.htm Accessed 10/04/2006)

One activity which the teacher is urged not to use is going through the transcripts bit by bit, explaining 'difficult' words to the students (Underwood: 1989). From their students' limited vocabulary, and most importantly, their established learning habits, Chinese students may be used to understanding everything completely or simply cannot bear the ambiguity which stems from hearing new vocabulary at all. As a result, a tendency to rely on the tapescripts without actually listening might be developing among the weaker students. At this stage, the teacher should make sure the tasks designed will not give the students enough time to read the transcripts before listening sufficiently.

It is sensible to develop a link between classroom learning and out-of-class learning. In addition to the above-mentioned guidelines suggested being carried out in class, some tasks like portfolio assignments for which learner autonomy is required can be adopted as a consolidation task after class. For example, students might be asked to write summaries of radio programmes or movies. The portfolio itself does not need to be magnificent, but the teacher should always ask students to pay attention to how ideas are expressed, along with noting down the main content and the important details of the text.

6.5 Sample lesson

In order to make it clear as to how these guidelines might be carried out in reality, a sample lesson is provided below. This lesson aims at developing the awareness of the language of attitudes and opinions. Designed for teachers, it is derived from an ABC (Australia Broadcasting Corporation) cite and designed to take about 45 minutes. It involves listening and re-listening with a series of different tasks for each listening.

Sample lesson for the guidelines

Level	Upper-intermediate and above
Time	45 minutes
Aims	To listen for the language of attitudes and opinions
Teaching Aids	Classroom equipped with Internet-accessed computers, earphones and microphones for each student
Organization	Pairs, groups and the whole class

Procedures:

Pre-listening (8 minutes)

1. Get the students to conduct discussion. This is a warming-up activity, it is to encourage students to think about and focus on the topic.

1) Get the students to discuss this question with the whole class:

---Have you ever heard of an ultra-marathon, for example, running for 100 hours with hardly any sleep?

2) Get the students to discuss the following two questions in pairs or groups:

---What do you think of 100-hour-running? Do you think it is an exciting exercise, an extreme challenge or simply a destructive activity?

---What problems do you predict the runner will encounter during the 100 hours' running?

2. The teacher summarizes their opinions, pools their ideas and sums up how many of them think running for 100 hours is exciting, and how many of them think it is dangerous. Then ask them what sort of problems they anticipate and ask them to make a list of problems without commenting.

3. Tell the students they are going to hear a conversation between two speakers on the topic of 'Dr Jim Cotter and the 100 hour challenge', Dr Jim Cotter has just completed a 100-hour run and studied the physical implications.

4. Ask the students to think of as many different expressions as they can that they think might use for expressing attitude and opinions, for example:

Well, I think...; As far as I'm concerned...; I believe that...; I find it...etc.

5. Ask the students to go on to the following website and listen to the recording, without opening the transcripts page.

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/inconversation/stories/2006/1683610.htm#>

While listening (35 minutes)

1. Get the students to listen to the recording (from the beginning to 6 minutes 40 seconds). Remind them to think about the questions, problems and what people's attitudes and behaviour are. Ask them to compare the answers they will have heard in pairs. And let them compare the expressions they will have identified from the recording with their list of expressions.

2. When finished, the teacher asks them what their attitudes are, whether they think running for 100 hour is exciting or dangerous, and what problems they identified.

3. Ask them what expressions Dr Jim Cotter used. Teacher then provides some phrases that are actually used for expressing opinions in conversation as follows:

We wondered if...; And the other thing that we have to put into perspective is...;

(People) actually...; ...the major problem (factor)...; ...the secondary issue...; ...in particular...etc.

4. Get the class to listen to the specific part of recording (from 4 minutes 13 seconds to 6 minutes 40 seconds). Ask the students to:
 - 1) Note down the questions pointed out by the interviewer.
 - 2) Identify Dr Jim Cotter's answers to the questions.
5. Get the students to compare what they have written down with their partners and to discuss with the whole class to confirm what the questions and answers are.
6. Tell the students that direct answers are not apparent in an academic context where questions are often reformulated by the person being spoken to, and this might result in difficulty in understanding questions and answers.
7. Let the students listen to the specific part (from 4 minutes 13 seconds to 6 minutes 40 seconds) again and identify what the specific questions and answers are, and then compare and discuss what they have identified with their pairs.
8. Get the students to look at the highlighted tapescripts (see appendix IV) of the exact part of the recording (from 4 minutes 13 seconds to 6 minutes 40 seconds). Ask them to see what the questions and answers are and to identify the expressions that indicate something that is not very important and the expressions that indicate something that is important.
9. Get the students to talk about the expressions they have identified with their pairs.

Post listening task_(2 minutes)

Assign the students to listen to rest of the recording by themselves after class by applying the procedures they were told to follow.

6.6 Useful resources

Buck (2001: 154) points out that all listening tasks present a sample of spoken language to the test-taker, and this is the one characteristic all listening tests share. In IELTS Listening, a range of accents and dialects are used in the recordings, which reflect the international usage of English. Using the authentic listening material for training therefore will help students familiarize themselves with accents and dialects. Thus we need to have spoken texts that contain these features. In particular, we need to control the content of the texts to ensure that we can meet test specifications. Finding suitable pre-recorded materials is not always easy, as every teacher knows; one alternative is to find target language situations for people to listen to. Nowadays, more and more audio materials are available over the Internet, for instance, the BBC World Service (British Broadcasting Corporation world service: www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice) and the ABC (Australia Broadcasting Corporation: www.abc.net.au) provide some very useful spontaneous speech and interactive discussion which are designed to be listened to by the general public, and other materials are kept in archives that can often be searched. Some of them provide transcripts free of charge as well (ibid: 157). All these can be used as source materials for exploiting for our non-participant and non-native listeners.

Knowing where to go is just the beginning. The essential problem is to identify what is suitable. Buck (2001:155) suggests that teachers need to listen to the recordings first as most broadcasts are meant for native speakers and many may be too difficult for second-language learners. Besides, there are other problems which are worth considering. Audio materials from the Internet are continually revised, which means they might be available for a period but not always. As far as my research is concerned, many of these audio files are not download-friendly, they only want you to listen online because of copyright concerns, which is understandable. In addition, the sound quality which requires reliable equipment without a doubt should be given special attention at the preparation stage. Besides, teachers, especially those who want to use the materials to test in a commercial manner, should be aware of the copyright problem. Asking permission by calling or emailing to the publisher can avoid

serious consequences. Nevertheless, these disadvantages should not overshadow the fact that some of the recordings off-air can make both good teaching materials and valuable training resources for teaching given the fact that participants do not have access to native speakers in the target language and authentic situations are not available. And regarding what has been discussed in chapter three, we need to ensure that listening texts have the characteristics of target language texts and what better way to ensure this than to actually record target-language use situations (ibid: 158).

Although radio broadcast material is often scripted and very formal, it is designed to be heard by the general public, as non-participant listeners, and it is also possible to find some very useful spontaneous speech, and interactive discussion which IELTS participants need in the interest of training for IELTS Listening Section 3. This feature can account for the appropriateness of the sample lesson provided in previous sub-chapter 6.5.

With regard to the text selected, the content is scientific; it provides a similar scenario to IELTS Section 3; the topic ‘100 hour running’, which is not very common is exciting, helps to stimulate students to listen for more information; besides, two speakers have different accents, namely, Australian and New Zealand. Though clear and easy to understand, this feature echoes the diversity in IELTS Listening; the length of the highlighted recording for focused training is around 3 minutes, which is roughly the duration of IELTS Listening section 3, this is another feature allowing students to practice a similar tasks, intensive listening in IELTS, in class.

The importance of authentic material has been discussed in Chapter three.

Undoubtedly it can be very valuable, but it is worth remembering that ‘authenticity is not an absolute virtue in the teaching world’ (Rixon: 1986: 15). Underwood suggests (1989: 102-107) the main factors influencing the choice are the kind of language, the length of text and its content. Additional criteria are the style and the speed of delivery, the quality of production, and the use of visual support material. Selecting IELTS Listening training material is of the same type of job, careful thinking and research work should be carried out prior to adapting any authentic materials in class.

Unquestionably, a great deal of exposure to spoken language and ample practice in various listening situations are needed in order to evaluate listening ability. However,

in addition to exposure and practice, it is vitally important for listeners to engage in the process of listening and develop a desire to understand. This is not something that exposure and practice alone can bring about (Rost 1991: 5).

6.7 Advantages and disadvantages of training materials

As I have discussed in Chapter Five, nowadays publishers all over the world are eager to promote their works in China's vast IELTS market which provides tens of thousands of participants annually, who are also potential customers. China's IELTS market consequently witnesses enormous amount of IELTS training materials from home or abroad appearing on the shelves every year. However, none of them is a panacea. Simply depending on them, either those which are published from the UK or Australia, or published by Chinese materials writers means risking the danger of lacking sufficient language backup. As Chinese EFL teachers, we should hold the responsibility for letting our learners not lose their way in various IELTS training materials. Participants should be warned about not counting on any IELTS training materials solely which should, in fact, be regarded as supplementary resources for practice or rehearsal. We should emphasize that the principles of successful listening lie in sufficient exposure, effective strategies and enduring confidence, not massive training materials.

6.8 Discussion

In this chapter, I designed the guidelines by looking at the literature and comparing it with my situation. What I set out to do was to create guidelines including the sample lesson which aim at helping IELTS teacher and students establish an effective training in the classroom and encourage students to apply these strategies to their independent study and preparation for the test; the way in which I wanted to do that was to reflect on the particular problems of Chinese learners and to read the literature on listening and teaching listening. The actual product is proposed for use by teachers, and possibly by self-directed learners. I am satisfied with the guidelines in a large sense.

The guidelines have a clear objective, which is to maximize the learning effect in the listening class and help learners to become more independent outside classroom. In terms of what should be carried out specifically in the classroom, the teacher needs to, firstly, provide suitable texts which are from a variety of non-exam formats and bear some features of academic conversation; secondly, help the students focus on their attention by getting them to think about the content and set them a purpose for participating; thirdly, set the tasks which entail the use of strategies; fourthly, let the learners do the tasks. The teacher should observe them as they carry out the tasks and note how they are doing the tasks, where they are succeeding and where they are having trouble. Fifthly, evaluate the tasks, asking whether everyone succeeded at the tasks; last but not least, provide a follow-up by using the listening tasks and evaluation as a lead-in to the next classroom or homework activity (Rost 1991: 9).

With regard to the actual product which is the sample lesson, the selected text is an off-air radio recording from an ABC (Australia Broadcasting Corporation) site on science topic. This text provides an academic scenario which has the characteristics of authentic target-language use. The lesson comprises pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening. At the pre-listening stage, students are ‘tuned in’ to two types of discussions, which are discussing with the whole class and with their groups or pairs, so that they know what to expect, both in general and for the particular task. An individual task follows to remind students to pay attention to the attitudes and opinions, which is the content of the conversation. It is helpful to focus at first on providing considerable pre-listening support which assist students when they come to match what they hear with their store of knowledge so that they can achieve a high level of success and thus become confident that they can listen effectively (Underwood 1989: 30-31).

The while-listening stage is the main emphasis of the class and lasts 35 minutes in total. Students are asked to listen to particular bits of the recording up to three times separately while finishing a series of different tasks during this period. Each particular bit last nearly three minutes, which is approximately the length of IELTS Listening section 3. The significance of doing this selective listening does not just lie in the timing, it helps to engage students actively and purposefully because, unquestionably, most of the learners initially find authentic listening material rather frustrating.

Besides, in the training classroom, what is being carried out is teaching and learning, not testing. What the teacher does is to break down the steps of the activity in order to provide sub-goals (Rost 1991: 12), therefore students' being given a second or third opportunity to listen to certain specific bits, to compare their understanding and to negotiate meaning with peers along with referring to the transcripts provide them with a less stressful but more supportive situation, which encourage them to concentrate and understand clearly how ideas are expressed and eventually to develop the skill of eliciting essential messages from spoken language in the academic setting. During this course, the teacher provides clear feedback to check how each task is done and points out essential structures when needed. For instance, when the teacher wants the students to notice one of the principles that they need in order to cope with this section, which is the typical structure of question and answer in academic discourse, the explanation is given. The students are told to be aware of that they do not get straight answers in authentic academic discourse, therefore it is vital to pay attention to how to understand questions and answers, and how to use questions to help understand answers in academic setting, which is not like normal conversation. In a word, identifying attitudes and opinions is the most important skill that IELTS Listening Section 3 demands. I believe that providing a systematic review of the recording and activities helps to consolidate students' learning and memory, good while-listening activities help them find their way through the listening text and build upon the expectations raised by pre-listening activities (Underwood 1989: 46).

Because of the time limit, the post listening part takes the form of assigning homework. The purpose of this task is to expand on the topic or language of the listening text, and transfer what students have learned in the classroom to another context. In a larger sense, students are encouraged to become more independent in terms of carrying out their own listening practice outside the classroom. Undoubtedly, the main objective of listening work in the classroom is to motivate and to equip the students for self-access work. The teacher should not take sole responsibility for building up an understanding of the listening text in the students (White 1998: 6). Students should develop their individual responsibility and set up self-study listening programme and goals. In fact, the demonstration in class which includes the type of the text and the tasks aimed at how to exploit the resources to the full can be regarded as a model for students' sustainable listening practice outside the classroom. Moreover,

students are recommended a list of useful sources of radio materials on the Internet, where they can expose themselves to various programmes and exploit them for purpose.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This paper pointed out that measures are needed to improve Chinese postgraduate candidates' performance for IELTS Listening. I set out to investigate the listening section of IELTS examination, and looked at the section itself and the training materials which I consider appropriate but not sufficient enough. I aimed to design guidelines based on the literature review on listening comprehension and testing listening.

In the end, I provided guidelines which are meant for teachers as suggestions and recommendations, but can also be used by self-directed students. The guidelines demonstrate the nature of the listening tasks and listening strategies, and provide a sample lesson which illustrates how these guidelines are carried out in practice. A list of useful sources of radio materials on the Internet are recommended for exploiting in carrying out tasks are also provided in the appendix.

I believe the guidelines including the sample lesson meet the objectives of setting them. I am satisfied with them. In addition to that, I believe they are not difficult to carry out. However, as for the sample lesson, there are some principles behind the teaching need to be aware of. With some thought and experimentation in advance, the teacher should make sure the equipment for students' use works well, downloading material which can be downloaded to personal equipment in advance might be one solution to minimizing the risk of network problems, if not, the teacher needs to listen to the recording all the way through at the preparation stage. (This procedure also applies to the downloaded recordings). Harmer (1998: 100) concludes that, through sufficient preparation teachers will be prepared for any problems, noises, accents etc. and can judge whether students will be able to cope with the recording and the tasks that go with it.

In terms of the process of creating guidelines including for designing the sample lesson, I found it a bit more difficult than I thought. The guidelines are supposed to be tried out by an IELTS Listening training class which entails the particular concern of what IELTS demands although it shares the similarities of a general listening class.

Therefore the difficulty appears when trying to strike a proper balance between exploiting the text to the full and avoiding being exam-oriented. The other difficulty is how to make these guidelines reflect Chinese students' particular problems in an effective way so that Chinese IELTS teachers can see applicable and effective suggestions. As I discussed in Chapter Two, potential Chinese overseas postgraduate student participants may have been significantly influenced by domestic English exams, which present a significant discrepancy compared with IELTS, for instance, the format, which is mainly composed of MCQs. I have no wish to simply claim that doing MCQs might give rise to the possibility of picking the alternatives by assumption other than comprehension of the text. It is true though that one of its disadvantages may result in students' guessing all or some of the answers and it may also be possible to complete some items without reference to the texts they are set on (Weir 1990: 44). And this established habitual behaviour will result in their bewilderment and diffidence when confronted with considerably diverse testing formats and tasks in IELTS where accurate comprehension in addition to correct spellings are demanded. Given this, every effort in the guidelines is made to let the student establish the concept of identifying exact messages, in this case, attitudes and opinions in the sample lesson.

Although I am not dissatisfied with the sample lesson, there are some areas I believe could be better. Firstly, the process of evaluating the task is not obvious. More effective measures are required to find out in which way the teacher can make sure every student succeed at the tasks. Secondly, the tasks I set are drawn from a narrow range which might result in a monotonous atmosphere in the classroom, therefore tasks which are focused in intention but variable in forms are in great need.

On reflection, I realize that my guidelines might be judged more objectively if statistical evidence was provided, which means if I had had the opportunity to try them out systematically in a summer school or institution where an IELTS training session is held. However, the complete course of conducting, observing and getting feedback in addition to collecting the data from participants and their progress throughout a complete IELTS training session which normally lasts no less than three months is something I could not afford within a few months for my dissertation. I will, however, carry this out later in my future career by putting these guidelines into practice to see

what will happen and how they work, and data should be collected from the teaching practice so as to see whether they are useful.

Rixon (1986: 121) believes that the goal of most good teaching is to help students develop to a point where they are independent of the teacher's help. I believe the role of the EFL teacher is to instruct our learners how to do something. White (1998: 9) points out that students should need strategies less and less as they get more familiar with the language and more competent at listening skills as learner autonomy is a larger and ultimate goal for the any EFL course. A good IELTS listening class leads directly towards this goal. The teacher should encourage learners to become independent, to seek out listening opportunities on their own outside the classroom and help to identify ways of using English media (radio broadcasts, TV and video tapes). As for IELTS teachers, they should encourage students all the way through. Keeping them informed of the significance of preparing for IELTS Listening lies not only in getting a satisfactory mark, but in coping with their future life less stressfully but more pleasantly and successfully in terms of both their social and academic life.

To sum up, as a Chinese EFL teacher, I believe it is of vital importance to help our students develop the listening skills they may need for future study, work or leisure, so that they will not be among the many people who, having studied English for several years, find, to their amazement or horror, that they are unable to understand the utterances of native speakers of English (Underwood 1989: ix). As for our postgraduate IELTS student candidates, we should help them to find ways to not only perform well in the examination but to cope better with their future academic and social life.

APPENDIX I

Example of Band Four exam paper (listening part)

(January, 2005)

URL <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/jiaoyu/8216/43375/43387/3132394.html>

Accessed 07/12/2005

2005 年 1 月 大学英语四级考试真题卷

College English Test-4

Part I Section A Listening Comprehension (20 minutes)

Directions: In this section, you will hear 10 short conversations. At the end of each conversation, a question will be asked about what was said. Both the conversation and the question will be spoken only once. After each question there will be a pause. During the pause, you must read the four choices marked A), B), C) and D), and decide which is the best answer. Then mark the corresponding letter on the Answer Sheet with a single line through the centre.

Example:

You will hear:

You will read."

- A) At the office.
- B) In the waiting room.
- C) At the airport.
- D) In a restaurant.

From the conversation we know that the two were talking about some work they had to finish in the evening. This conversation is most likely to have taken place at the office. Therefore, A) "At the office" is the best answer. You should choose [A] on the Answer Sheet and mark it with a single line through the centre.

Sample Answer [A] [B] [C] [D]

1. A) The man enjoys travelling by car.
B) The man lives far from the subway.
C) The man is good at driving.
D) The man used to own a car.
2. A) Tony should continue taking the course.
B) She approves of Tony's decision.
C) Tony can choose another science course.
D) She can't meet Tony so early in the morning.
3. A) She has to study for the exam.
B) She is particularly interested in plays.

- C) She's eager to watch the new play.
- D) She can lend her notes to the man.
4. A) They will be replaced by on-line education sooner or later.
- B) They will attract fewer kids as on-line education expands.
- C) They will continue to exist along with on-line education.
- D) They will limit their teaching to certain subjects only.
5. A) Most students would like to work for a newspaper.
- B) Most students find a job by reading advertisements.
- C) Most students find it hard to get a job after they graduate.
- D) Most students don't want jobs advertised in the newspapers.
6. A) Move the washing machine to the basement.
- B) Turn the basement into a workshop.
- C) Repair the washing machine.
- D) Finish his assignment.
7. A) Some students at the back cannot hear the professor.
- B) The professor has changed his reading assignment.
- C) Some of the students are not on the professor's list.
- D) The professor has brought extra copies of his assignment.
8. A) She doesn't want to talk about the contest.
- B) She's modest about her success in the contest.
- C) She's spent two years studying English in Canada.
- D) She's very proud of her success in the speech contest.
9. A) Talking about sports.
- B) Writing up local news.
- C) Reading newspapers.
- D) Putting up advertisements
10. A) They shouldn't change their plan.
- B) They'd better change their mind.

- C) The tennis game won't last long.
- D) Weather forecasts are not reliable.

Section B Compound Dictation

Directions: In this section, you will hear a passage three times. When the passage is read for the first time, you should listen carefully for its general idea. When the passage is read for the second time, you are required to fill in the blanks numbered from S1 to S7 with the exact words you have just heard. For blanks numbered from S8 to S10 you are required to fill in the missing information. You can either use the exact words you have just heard or write down the main points in your own words. Finally; when the passage is read for the third time, you should check what you have written.

There are a lot of good cameras available at the moment--most of these are made in Japan but there are also good (S1)_____ models from Germany and the USA. We have (S2)_____ range of different models to see which is the best (S3)_____ money. After a number of different tests and interviews with people who are (S4)_____ assessed, our researchers (S5)_____ with the different cameras being the Olympic BY model as the best auto-focus camera available at the moment. It costs \$200 although you may well want to spend more--(S6)_____ much as another \$200--on buying (S7)_____ lenses and other equipment. It is a good Japanese camera, easy to use. (S8)_____ whereas the American versions are considerably more expensive The Olympic BY model weighs only 320 grams which is quite a bit less than other cameras of a similar type. Indeed one of the other models we looked at weighed almost twice as much. (S9)_____. ALL the people we interviewed expressed almost total satisfaction with it (S10)_____

APPENDIX II

Example of IELTS training materials (pp. 47-49.)

Listening section of *Insight into IELTS*. (updated edition) (Jakeman, V. and McDowell, C. (2001). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. original pp. 22-24.)

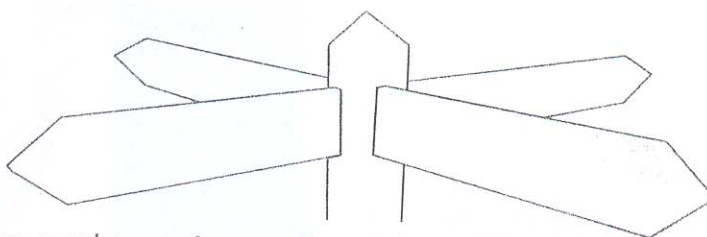
Listening

UNIT 6 Following signpost words

- What are 'signpost words'?
- How do they help us to understand?

Good public speakers and lecturers illustrate the stages of their talk through the use of 'signpost words'. Being able to identify and follow the signpost words will help you to understand formal spoken English.

Pre-listening



As with writing, speakers make use of special words to help introduce ideas and to provide a framework for what they are saying, especially in formal speech, such as a lecture or a talk. We can think of these words as 'signpost words' because they direct our listening; in other words, they warn us that more information is coming and suggest what kind of information this may be: e.g. additional, positive, negative, similar, different. They may also introduce examples of a main point made earlier.

- Look at the sample of unfinished 'spoken' text below. It starts with the signpost word *while*, which suggests that there is a contrast or opposite to follow.

While a great deal has been achieved in the area of cancer research, there ...

This sentence could be completed with the words: ... *is still a lot we do not understand about cancer.*

Here are some possible 'directions' that the signpost words can take you in.

- a Leading towards a comparison
 - b Leading towards a contrast or opposite
 - c Introducing an example of what was said earlier
 - d Suggesting cause and effect or result
 - e Providing additional information
 - f Setting out the stages of a talk
- First, read the sentences **1–10** on the next page and identify the signpost words and the direction (**a–f** above) that the words are taking you in. Then go on to the pair activity that follows.

- 1 Incoming governments often make promises which they cannot keep. For instance ...
- 2 Every Roman town had at its centre a forum, where people came together to conduct their official and religious affairs. In addition, the forum ...
- 3 The meteorological office predicted rain for the two weeks of the Olympic Games. In consequence, ...
- 4 Learning a foreign language can be difficult and at times frustrating. However, ...
- 5 Not only did the Second World War result in the displacement of millions of innocent civilians, it ...
- 6 Despite the efforts of the government to reduce the incidence of smoking among teenagers and young adults, I regret to say that smoking ...
- 7 This is how to approach writing an essay. First, you should read the question carefully. Then ...
- 8 No matter how hard you try to justify the sport of fox hunting, the fact remains that ...
- 9 Firstly I would like to talk about the early life of J. F. Kennedy. Secondly ... and thirdly ...
- 10 On the one hand, it may be advisable to study hard the night before an exam; on the other hand, ...



- Try to complete the unfinished statements above by creating an ending which makes sense in each case, using the signpost words in the text to guide you.
- Read the finished texts out loud to your partner so that you can practise the intonation patterns which go with the signpost words. Make sure your voice rises and falls in the right places to reflect your intended meaning.



EXTRACT 1

You can check the intonation patterns by listening to Unit 6, Extract 1, which gives some possible ways of completing the sentences.



EXTRACT 2

IELTS Listening Section 3

Note completion and labelling a diagram

IELTS Section 3 Listening takes the form of a conversation between two or more people discussing an academic topic. Unlike the dialogues in Section 1, where the speakers are discussing everyday topics, Section 3 will require more careful attention to the conversation or argument being expressed. In the following example, you will hear an extract from a university tutorial with four speakers taking part. First look at the questions below and make sure you understand exactly what you have to label on the diagram.

Questions 1–3

Complete the notes. Use **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS** for each answer.

ROVER ROBOT

The robot does the work of a (1) It looks like a (2) on wheels. It weighs 16.5 kg and travels quite (3)

Questions 4–7

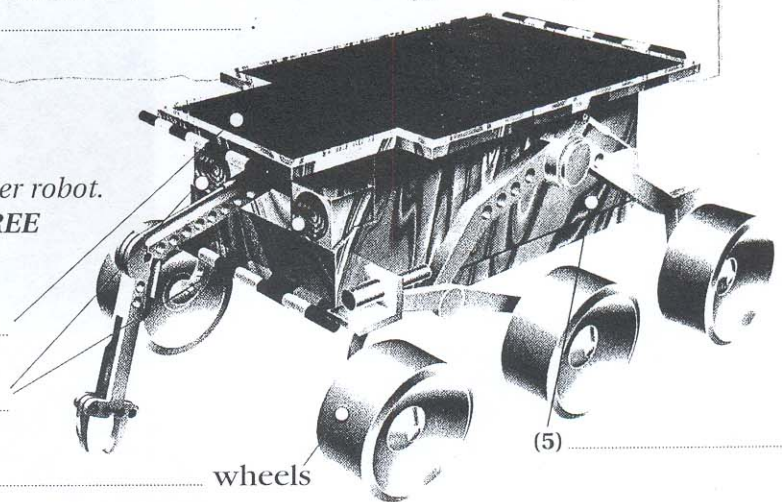
Label the diagram of the rover robot. Write **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS** for each answer.

(4)

(6)

(7) wheels

(5)



Questions 8–10

Complete the notes. Use **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS** for each answer.

The rover cannot be steered in real time because of the (8)
Scientists decide on a (9) for the rover.
Mars is similar to Earth because it may have (10)



For further practice, do the Supplementary activity on page 110.

APPENDIX III

Useful sources of radio materials on the Internet

Radio materials on the internet refer to the programmes which can be accessed via internet, but RealAudio software, for instance, Microsoft Media Player or Realone Player are needed to be installed in your personal computer, you can then either listen to them online or download them. Copyright issue should be taken into account seriously. Legally you should get permission by calling or emailing to the publisher before starting using them in classroom.

ABC Radio

Official website: <http://www.abc.net.au>

ABC, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation is Australia's national non-commercial public broadcaster. The ABC can be seen and heard throughout metropolitan and regional Australia, and overseas via its Asia-Pacific television service and Radio Australia.

As for its online radio service, 'Programmes a-z' (<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/programs.htm>) provides off-air recordings, you can either listen to them on-line or download to your personal device. Transcripts and play lists can be sorted by subject areas, click the link <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/inconversation/default.htm>, then pick one as you wish, for instance, 'lecture and commentary'.

NB Not all Radio National programs are transcribed, but a considerable amount of the transcripts are provided.

BBC Radio 4

Official website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4>

BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, is the largest broadcasting corporation in the world. It produces programmes and information services, broadcasting on television, radio, and the Internet.

BBC Radio 4 is a British domestic radio station which broadcasts a wide variety of chiefly spoken-word programmes including news, drama, comedy, science and history.

In particular, 'Listen Again' is the programme archives

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/progs/listenagain.shtml>, which provide hundreds of off-air recordings called 'from a to z', where more than 100 programmes recordings are available on-line.

NB Most of them are downloadable with background knowledge provided on the web page, however, no transcripts are provided.

BBC World Service

Official website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/index.shtml>

The BBC World Service is one of the most widely recognised international broadcasters of radio programming, transmitting in 33 languages to many parts of the world. The English service broadcasts 24 hours a day.

Voice of America

Official website: <http://www.voa.gov>

VOA, Voice of America, is the official international radio and television broadcasting service of the United States federal government. It is similar to other international broadcasters such as the BBC World Service.

VOA programs in many of its broadcast languages are available online in both streaming media and downloadable formats.

APPENDIX IV

Transcripts of the conversation in the sample lesson

(the highlighted parts are the ones used in sample class)

(<http://www.otago.ac.nz/profiles/staff/jimcotter.html> Accessed 31/07/2006)

Dr Jim Cotter and the 100 hour challenge 20 July 2006

Music

Robyn Williams: I think you'll know that theme - *Chariots of Fire*. Olympic heroes, when athletes were gentlemen, and didn't do deals with multinational sports gear firms, take substances or (god forbid) cheat.

Those were short and middle distance runners. Most of us have had a go at that. Some have tried half-marathons, City to Surfs, or even something longer.

But what about those ultra-marathons, or trying to run for a hundred hours; surely the body isn't made to cope with that.

But plenty have a go, and one of them is my guest tonight. Dr Jim Cotter is a lecturer in the Physical Education Department at the University of Otago in New Zealand.

Jim Cotter: The 100 hour challenge is adventure racing normally, people usually compete in teams, often mixed-gender teams, they have to be mixed-gender. And basically about a day before you start, or the night before you start you get told where you have to pass through, the transition points, and you have to pull up those on a map and figure out how you're going to go from A to B to C to D and then get there as quick as you can. And typically they would be 90 to 120 hours in duration.

Robyn Williams: And you just keep going, irrespective of sleep?

Jim Cotter: At some point you have to sleep but you nearly always get through the first night without anybody sleeping. Sometimes you get through a second night, but at some point you do have to sleep in 100-odd hours.

Robyn Williams: How do you view this kind of extreme challenge? Is it something that is absolutely destructive to the body?

Jim Cotter: We wondered that, and many people would say that that volume of exercise without any meaningful rest is destructive. Intuitively that would seem the case, but from the research that we've done we have no evidence at all to indicate that. And the other thing that

we have to put it in perspective of is, most people spend a week being entirely sedentary and we don't know that exercising more or less continuously for 100 hours is any more destructive than doing nothing for 100 hours. Our body's not necessarily designed to do either.

Robyn Williams: No, but intuitively, if you look at the normal range, like a half-marathon that some people who've been training can reach, over and beyond that, the multi-marathon stuff, it stands to reason that this is a point where the body, with constant pounding, would begin to break down.

Jim Cotter: It does stand to reason but one big difference is that we shift modes of the exercises. So for example we might spend 12 or 16 hours running, which ultimately by the second day that will become a walk, but then you switch to kayaking and then you might be rafting, or horse riding, or abseiling, or mountain biking. So you're switching around between muscle groups and in that sense we don't know that it's destructive because probably the more destructive exercise is the eccentrically demanding exercise, the exercise that can damage muscles. That is where your muscle contracts but it's actually lengthening, it's trying to resist the lengthening and that's classic of running. You're trying to break the falling and that's the type of exercise that would damage a muscle, therefore we might think well that's the one that breaks us down. But, as I say, you don't do that necessarily for too long before you switch to another mode.

Robyn Williams: What about heat problems, because it's well known that if you run too far in too greater heat, muscles can in fact melt. What are the limits as far as your studies are concerned?

Jim Cotter: Well, that's a completely different area, that's one of my main research focuses, but if we just keep that back on the ultra-endurance in regard to heat. People actually end up exercising so slowly in a sense that by the time you've been going 20 or 50 or 70 hours you can't keep the intensity up and therefore the heat isn't such a problem. The major problem with heat for an athlete is how hard they're exercising. What the environment's doing is very much a secondary issue; the major heat factor on the body is how hard the exercise is, and in particular how hard it is for that person, their own cardio vascular system's ability to deal with the heat.

So people end up going so slowly that no, it's not a major factor. And normally the water availability prevents any major dehydration anyway and it's part of the planning. If you are going to be travelling on ridge tops, which are usually mostly efficient, and you have to plan to carry sufficient water and to visit water that you can disinfect.

Robyn Williams: What are some of the worse examples you've had of those who've had in fact a kind of muscle meltdown because they haven't taken those precautions that you mention?

Jim Cotter: I've never seen anybody have a muscle meltdown, rhabdomyolysis is the term used for that. That's a clinical situation that people probably need another disposing factor to get into. It plays into the hands of the sports drink industry to have us believe that good hydration - good hydration meaning adequate or you hydration, normal body water is essential for sport performance. But there's actually no evidence to indicate strongly that dehydration facilitates heat stroke or muscle meltdown - the rhabdomyolysis, there probably has to be other driving factors. Dehydration can certainly make your body hot, can make it hotter than it normally would be, but again, most of our studies are done under very inappropriate laboratory situations where people get hot by virtue of the environment they're in, in a lab. In the field, it's yet to be demonstrated that that's a major problem.

Robyn Williams: So in what ways have you made the sports drink people cross in recent times?

Jim Cotter: We haven't made the sports drink people cross, we're only embarking on this area of research really. Professor Tim Nokes in South Africa, he's done a lot more research on this area and he's a very strong advocate that the sports drink industry, the research has played into its hands and that there's unsubstantiated call for people to be well-hydrated all the time, and that's correct in the Sports Medicine Guidelines. And in fact there's a saying, if you look at the laboratory studies they certainly indicate that people do get hotter, and if you look at the heat casualty literature, many people are in fact dehydrated when they experience heat illnesses.

But, for example, the latest research finding on that found that 16% of people with heat stroke were dehydrated. But they neglect to mention how many people beside them who weren't heat stroked were also dehydrated and the environments that they became heat stroked it's quite possible that a similar number of asymptomatic people were also dehydrated. So that that literature gets supported very selectively and, as I say, it plays into the hands of the sports drink industry.

Robyn Williams: So if you are dehydrated why not just drink water?

Jim Cotter: Well, in most situations it's absolutely appropriate: if you're thirsty drink water. The other major thing is if you believe that you're going to dehydrate so quickly that you can't adequately replenish in the exercise it's good to either start hyper-hydrated, as in with more body water, or start drinking before the onset of thirst, and that's probably very sensible. But if the exercise continues too long, and particularly once you get over four hours, you inevitably

just dilute down the body's fluids and that ends up virtually being a very dangerous situation. Some people call it water intoxication; the more appropriate term is hyponatremia, you're diluting down the electrolyte content of the body and that's a very dangerous clinical situation, not least of all because it can be misdiagnosed. So in that sense, for very long exercise water can become inappropriate, but that applies to very, very few people.

Robyn Williams: What about the difference with sports drinks themselves, which claim to have a balance of electrolytes that will enable you to train more effectively. Is that claim justified?

Jim Cotter: It depends what type of claim; I don't believe in most situations it is. For anybody exercising under an hour, which is the majority of people who do exercise, there's simply no requirement. And in fact they've already got usually towards the upper limit or in excess of their total daily recommended intake of salt and of calories. So that would have been two of the fantastic benefits of exercise that they've just nullified in the process of taking a sports drink. And as I say, that's for people under an hour; for people over an hour it does appear that the electrolytes and in particular the carbohydrate become useful, and that's to help the performance as much as anything. But as I say, that's relatively few people, but it doesn't mean that we should be training with that all of the time and a lot of these people use it for training.

It's yet to be shown what the optimal carbohydrate and electrolyte and water requirement for training is, because for example, until the mid 1960s it was advocated that you train without hydration, for example for marathon running. And then it went completely the other way, and now the sports medicine guidelines, some indicate that you drink as much as is tolerable. And there's a growing band of scientists who indicate that that's potentially dangerous and it may not be appropriate for many people doing exercise.

We've just finished a study with heat acclimatisation or heat acclimation, we've been doing it in a laboratory environment and we dehydrated people every day during heat acclimation and we got indication that there was a better heat acclimation if we dehydrated them every day than if we didn't. And that flies in the face of the sports medicine guidelines, if guidelines ever speak to hydration. So, we think that the guidelines regarding hydration and carbohydrate and electrolyte requirements may need at least some fine-tuning.

Robyn Williams: Well you're obviously a runner yourself, what do you use, what do you do yourself?

Jim Cotter: I don't tend to drink much in training. I'm not suggesting that other people shouldn't, and you certainly live in a country where it's hot - and heat's stressful. And in that sense, particularly for the people out doing prolonged exercise that wouldn't seem to be sensible. But I don't drink unless I'm thirsty and as I say, Professor Tim Nokes from South

Africa is certainly a strong advocate of that and is starting to focus his research quite clearly on that.

Robyn Williams: Do you ever do a 100 hour run yourself?

Jim Cotter: No, you don't have to do 100 hour run during training to prepare for the competition of it. In fact, it wouldn't seem to be appropriate.

Robyn Williams: What's the longest you have?

Jim Cotter: Probably the longest exercise we've done is 136 hours, I think.

Robyn Williams: You personally?

Jim Cotter: Yeah.

Robyn Williams: And what did that consist of the 136 hours?

Jim Cotter: That particular one was some ice climbing, horse riding, rafting, canoeing, mountain biking, running, trekking - so it was split up fairly well across different disciplines. I don't remember how much sleep we got in that but I think it was order of 7 hours. The one we did just last November was...I think that took us 126 hours and we got in the order 5 or 6 hours sleep, and that was primarily kayaking, trekking, running and mountain biking.

Robyn Williams: How did you feel at the end?

Jim Cotter: Not so bad. I mean you get to the end and whenever you finish a big accomplishment like that, an adventure like that there's some exhilaration and overcomes the tiredness, but there's a few scrapes and bruises and things like that but otherwise no, not so bad.

Robyn Williams: Did your body seem to take a long time to recover?

Jim Cotter: Yes, it's hard to say how long it takes to recover from a race like that. Two or three days later you sort of feel like you're back to normal but if you go out for a decent run or something like that it's very obvious that you're not. So it's something we simply don't know and it's something we have been researching is how long the recovery takes. But there's different aspects of recovery and it depends what you're talking about. It's probably a few weeks, which becomes an issue for people who are now professional on this type circuit, how many of these races should they be doing per year, what's the cost on them.

Robyn Williams: Going back to the ordinary runner, someone like me going out every night for well, depending on the mood, half an hour, an hour - what would your advice be given the

confusion we have to some extent from the literature, from the experiments, from the manufacturers of these different substances, of what we really should do?

Jim Cotter: In terms of drinking, if you're going for half an hour or an hour I'd say don't bother drinking at all. You're not going to lose that much sweat. I mean, a person who's not particularly fit are very unlikely to be sweating at more than a litre and a half per hour and that's people who are not highly trained; that's sort of an upper limit. One and half litres per hour is, what's that, 2% of your body mass let's say, that's not substantial. There's some indication from the lab studies that that will be starting to affect your skilled motor performance, starting to affect your physiological function, for example, heart rate and core temperature might be slightly higher. The extent to which that's actually valid in the field conditions we're not entirely sure but so what, I mean it's a training run, who's to say that that's not in fact more beneficial than taking the drink and preventing some of that additional rise, if in fact it occurs.

Robyn Williams: And when you see adverts from the sports drink people apply the bullshit filter.

Jim Cotter: Absolutely.

Guests

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